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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGERFO

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TAGS: KPAL KWBG MOPS PREL IS

SUBJECT: SECURITY FORCES DEPLOYED IN PARALLEL AS EGYPT TRIES TO CALM TENSIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 02007

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Security forces under President Abbas' (Abu Mazen) control deployed throughout Gaza on May 17 and 18 in response to the HAMAS-led government's deployment of a new security force composed of militants from factions loyal to HAMAS. Egyptian officials hosted a meeting between high-level Fatah and HAMAS representatives on May 17 to defuse the situation. The Interior Ministry withdrew its forces from major intersections in Gaza City on May 18, but HAMAS-affiliated militias and Abu Mazen's forces were still deployed in parallel in other parts of Gaza. Salam Fayyad told the Consul General during a May 18 meeting that the standoff is a serious test for Abu Mazen and that allowing the status quo of parallel deployments to continue would be a victory for HAMAS. END SUMMARY.

Rival Security Forces Deployed,
No Clashes Yet

¶12. (C) Civil Police, NSF and Presidential Guard forces fanned out across Gaza on May 17 and 18 following orders from President Abbas in response to the HAMAS-led government's decision to deploy a new security force composed of HAMAS-affiliated militias (reftel). These PASF elements were reportedly supported in some areas by Fatah Tanzim. Presidential Guard sources told Poloff that regular PASF forces were deployed in many of the same areas as the Interior Ministry's new security force. ConGen FSNI in Gaza reported that despite tense verbal exchanges and aggressive posturing by both sides, there had been no reports of violence. Abu Mazen's office in Ramallah issued a statement on May 17 demanding that the Interior Ministry immediately withdraw its forces.

¶13. (C) General Intelligence sources confirmed to POL FSN that HAMAS-affiliated Interior Ministry forces had withdrawn their patrols from major intersections in Gaza City. However, Interior Ministry forces continued their patrols in the Jabaliya, Shati and Khan Yunis areas. PASF forces loyal to Abu Mazen were deployed in parallel in many of these areas.

Egypt Working to Defuse Tensions

¶14. (C) The Egyptian General Intelligence (Mukhabarat) Chief for Gaza Ahmad Aldo al-Khaleh hosted a meeting at his Gaza City home on the evening of May 17 between senior HAMAS and Fatah officials in an effort to defuse tensions between the

two sides. Interior Ministry spokesman Khaled Abu Hilal led the HAMAS delegation and former PSO officer Samir al-Mishrawi led the Fatah delegation. During a May 18 telcon with USSC staff, al-Khaleh reported that discussions were positive and that both sides are "afraid of each other" and eager to avoid further escalation. Al-Khaleh said the two sides agreed to meet again and allow the PA Civil Police to mediate between them at a local level. Al-Khaleh said that he planned to meet separately with Interior Minister Said Siam on May 18.

¶ 15. (C) West Bank Fatah activist Hussein al-Sheikh (protect) reported to POL FSN that Interior Minister Siam met separately with the Fatah Secretary General in Gaza, Ahmad Hillis, on May 17. Al-Sheikh said that Siam promised to withdraw Interior Ministry militias from some parts of Gaza City during the meeting. Additional meetings between Fatah and HAMAS are planned for the evening of May 19.

Fayyad: Standoff Is Serious
Challenge to Abu Mazen

¶ 16. (C) During a May 18 meeting with the Consul General, PLC member Salam Fayyad underscored that the Interior Ministry's deployment of militias in Gaza was a serious political and security challenge to Abu Mazen (reftel). Politically, the HAMAS-led government had deployed its militias in open defiance of Abu Mazen's authority. Fayyad described the move as a bold attempt by HAMAS to gain control of Gaza. In terms of security, Fayyad said clashes between the two forces could lead to an all out confrontation. Fayyad said Abu Mazen cannot afford to allow the status quo of deployment of unofficial HAMAS forces to continue because doing so would be a major victory for HAMAS.

Fatah Militants Attack Highest-Ranking
HAMAS Official in the West Bank

¶ 17. (C) In the West Bank town of Tulkarem, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades militants attacked a building where Deputy Prime Minister Nasir al-Shaer was meeting with the Fatah governor of Tulkarem. His meeting was cut short when the militants surrounded the building and began firing in the air and chanting anti-HAMAS slogans. Reportedly, members of the Civil Police escorted al-Shaer safely out of town. So far, the HAMAS-Fatah violence has yet to spread to the West Bank, where HAMAS has far fewer armed personnel.

COMMENT

¶ 18. (C) The parallel security deployments in Gaza underscore the growing possibility that the political battle underway between Fatah and HAMAS could turn bloody. While neither side is eager for an armed confrontation, neither side is willing to back down. For now, Egyptian efforts have helped to avert clashes in Gaza. The National Dialogue, scheduled for next week, offers an opportunity to channel the battle back into the political realm, but a failure of the dialogue could result in a renewed and possibly bloody confrontation on the streets of Gaza.

WALLES